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thoughts in
middle life

By

Godfrey Locker Lampson

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THOUGHTS IN MIDDLE LIFE

By Godfrey Locker Lampson

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Three Stages of Life.

THE difference between youth, middle-age, and old-age, is this :

The first lives in the future, the second in the present, and the third in the past.

If youth lived in the present, it would have no ambition ; if old-age lived in the future, it would have no hope ; it is only the middle-aged who can afford to live in all three.

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Death.

IT is good at times to reflect upon death, for he who does so may avoid some disappointments, and gain a truer prospect of the life in which he is.

He will picture himself lying helpless upon the bed of his last sickness, when nothing matters but that he should die with a quiet conscience. His possessions already belong almost to another, who will die like himself. His hatreds, vanities, jealousies, malice, he sees to be but smoke ; his ambition, worthless effort ; his lusts, ashes ; the sum-total of all worldly interests, next to nothing. If this be not enough to humble false pride and quench a ravening appetite for transitory, unsubstantial shadows, nothing will be. For the majority it will suffice to cool their passions and tame their proud ambitions, making them better citizens and humbler men.

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The Secret of Happiness.

TO aim at a full rather than a long life is the ambition of the wise, for it is no satisfaction in a world where happiness is so thinly spread upon the bread of experience to drag out a trivial or unoccupied existence. A carp at the bottom of a stew-pond, or one of the giant tortoises, may keep alive for several hundred years, and save the wear and tear of nerve and tissue by remaining motionless for eight out of twelve months in the year. But unless we are content to imitate the lower vertebrates, or pass our time like the vegetable kingdom in unintelligent growth and decay, our aim should be to crowd as many lifelike hours as possible into our poor, chequered chronicles. His Grace of Grouse-moor may find himself almost as poor as Lazarus when, among the dust and ashes of the past, he hunts for the glowing moments

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that made his life richer and his usefulness more blest ; while some half-starved writer in a Fleet Street attic can hardly calculate his wealth.

The true secret of a contented life is not to squeeze as much out of it, but to pay as much into it as possible ; to contribute the sum of one's powers to the common stock ; since, if that be the primary purpose—the genuine, altruistic endeavour—the crop will not fail to be in generous proportion to the sacrifice and outlay.

Every man is the tenant of an allotment, of a small patch of opportunity, and his duty is the intensive cultivation of the little holding—an expenditure of care, and honest, cheerful labour which will be reaped in harvests of wealth and happiness. For just as a piece of derelict ground, rank and stony and unpromising, can be transformed into a garden plot with its flowers and roots for human sustenance, so too can the dingiest and most unlikely prospect, the most meagre of footholds, the humblest of stations, be

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converted to a bower that even princes would be glad to dwell in.

This, then, is the duty of man—to give and to take, but rather to give ; to labour and to rest, but rather to labour ; to construct and appreciate, but rather to construct ; to act and reflect, but rather to act ; to work upon the tapestry of life and finish his share of the picture, if he can ; but so to leave it, that, if unfinished, it can be completed by other hands and ultimately included among the trophies of the world. This is the secret of a happy life, and requires no alchemy for its solution. It is not buried in the darkness of metaphysics, nor in the stone age, nor in future discoveries. It is enthroned in the present moment. It is within call for you and me throughout our mortal voyage, and, until the shadows of night descend upon our histories, will never fail us when we seek its help.

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Enjoyment of the Present.

IT is a mistake to live too much in the future ; for the future of yesterday is the present of to-day, and to-day's future will soon be nothing more than the present in its turn. To enjoy, to appreciate, to realise the existing hour is one of the arts of life.

To-day I am healthful and solvent, but next week I may be mortally sick or a bankrupt debtor. To-day I have youth, and am free from the terrors of poverty or disgrace. Let me enjoy these irrecoverable hours while I can. How do I know what twelve more months will do to me ? Then, perhaps, I shall look back with longing to these happy days, and lament my unconsciousness of, my almost wilful blindness to the peace and sweet security of this golden time.

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Favours.

TO confer a favour upon any one is almost to put him in the wrong, for you place him under an obligation which he cannot but feel, and, if of an ungenerous disposition, may soon be apt to resent. It is a debt which ought to be paid, and you are his creditor. To that extent he is insolvent until his return is made. The favour, therefore, if he is reminded of it, tends in time to become a positive grievance, which only some further favour can assuage; and, instead of gratitude, the original kindness breeds an oppressive feeling of liability, and in the end, maybe, of actual unreasoning dislike.

But he who does you a favour takes you to that extent under his protection. He is the patron of your fortunes. He enlists you under his banner against the strokes of Fate. Yours is the debt, his the pleasant expectation

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of gratitude for his kindness. You have called out the better part of him—his charity—and it fills him with a sense of well-doing, and he loves you for it.

The lesson, therefore, to be drawn is this : That if you wish to knit a man's heartstrings to yourself, accept and seek his favours rather than do him any ; for the greater your debt to him, the more he will affect you ; the heavier your obligation, the more he will endeavour to advance your interests. Moreover, no man cares to make a bad debt, and he may deem that a little further and yet a little further credit may avail to secure it.

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Historical Perspective.

TO extol the great personalities of the past at the expense of those of the present, is a common and incurable habit in mankind. No man is a hero to his own valet, and the same principle may be applied as in part the cause of our invidious comparisons between the men of yesterday and those of to-day. The great actors of a bygone age stand out against the background of history, purged of their parasites and purified from trivial circumstance—their great qualities, their supreme achievements framed in isolation, liberated from the mass of vulgar encumbrance and paltry incident that loaded them in their own day.

The same good fortune will attend our contemporaries, when our descendants look back and view them stripped of all but the ultimate results. They will then in their turn magnify these players of ours to the disparagement of their own, and reckon that mankind is

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gradually losing the power of reproducing the stature of a former time.

At this very hour, we, this present age, have living in our midst our own illustrious company, the little band that young and old will laud and reverence, and celebrate and try to imitate, when we, poor critics, have been dust in the churchyard for many a long year. Who are they? Not those, possibly, who are now held in the highest honour; some of them, maybe, even ignored. It requires distance, apparently, to pick out the grandest peaks. At the foot of the range it is impossible; just as you cannot mark who is the tallest man if you are wedged in a crowd. We may be choosing our inferior summits for this exacting comparison with the past. Indeed, it is because, as a rule, we are not comparing like with like; in other words, because of our uncritical selection, combined with too close a familiarity with the meaner details and petty incidental mechanism of a modern career, as we see it, that we are such poor judges of our own times.

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Prayer.

WERE I a disbeliever in a personal, omniscient, all-powerful God, I would still make supplication in the privacy of my chamber to an imaginary, invisible Disposer of events ; choosing, maybe, ‘The Future,’ or some other such abstraction, to apostrophise. I would not pray that my country should be spared the convulsions of an earthquake ; that the weather in August should be favourable to the harvest ; or that the infant heir to the throne should grow into a tall, handsome man. These are beside human powers, and would require, as a result of prayer, the particular intervention of an individual, omnipotent, and indulgent Deity. But I would pray for those things over which I had myself some measure of control—fortitude in adversity, humility in triumph, high ideals, integrity, patience, deter-

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mination, sobriety, vigilance in making use of opportunities, courage, cheerfulness, perseverance, industry. Over these and other qualities of the kind man has a large share of influence, and it needs no miraculous intervention to acquire or develop them. The very act of supplication, whether to an invisible Power imagined for the purpose, or to a Deity in whom full confidence is felt, gives support to the will that wants; and reiteration and concentration, whatever be one's views of the unseen world, have a cumulative effect in strengthening that support and weakening any adverse impulse that may be present, and cannot fail in the long run to convert the wished-for state almost into a habit, making the will paramount in the direction desired.

Success in prayer, to whatsoever other cause its various votaries may assign it, can therefore be proved to result from this empirical agency also, which any one with sufficient goodwill may test for himself. In other words, it need not be regarded as a supernatural

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secret only, dependent on what is termed a miracle ; but may be considered also as an outcome, when the method is tried, of wholly natural means, available to every sect, and responsive to any one who makes good use of them.

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The Fear of Death.

IT is not the bare thought of death, the escape of the spirit from exhausted flesh, nor even the doubt about the morrow, that fills the mind with dread. It is death's preliminaries—ugly, creeping disease; protracted suffering; long, harrowing scenes for beloved witnesses; helpless, crippled, senile hours with youth around one; the final struggle; the shocking remains that have to be quickly buried—that make us craven when we think of our end. There is nothing to terrify in the mere thought of the spirit's flight, for that is one of release; and as to fears about an after-life, how do we know that what is called 'personality' will accompany us? We may be reasonably confident that memory will not.

If our spirit, indeed, had no beginning and is to have no end; if this life be but a

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moment in its infinite existence, certain is it that it has no memory of the last or of any of the preceding stages. Why, then, in its next stage should it have any memory of the present? The analogy is all against the supposition. But if there be no memory, there can be no comparison either with a better or a worse state, and therefore no regrets.

Sweep away the corridors to Death's chamber, the ante-rooms of pain, the dark passages where men are tortured, the introductory horrors of dissolution, and, lastly, the final struggle—and, at its worst, the thought of death can then only cause grief at parting with the happiness of life.

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The Mainspring of Conduct.

IF we could have a man's career, with the motives for all his actions, traced before us, we should be surprised to find how many of his most important decisions had rested upon purely personal grounds. A slight, real or imagined, has frequently caused a man to change his political party, and for the rest of his public life to support with all the means at his disposal measures which he would otherwise have as strenuously opposed. Or a despised and rejected lover, from being indolent and unambitious, may, out of a kind of revenge upon his mistress, by revealing qualities which she had never guessed, transform the whole tenor of his life, and wrest from Fortune some of the world's great prizes.

So, if you desire a man's support for a cause which you have at heart, wound his

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pride before advocating its merits, and you will have less chance of success than with a much inferior case, if you please him a little.

In truth, nearly all our chief determinations are the result of our feelings rather than our judgment; and it is, therefore, a prudent rule of life to study the sensibilities of men rather than their intellects. He who does so is the man of tact, the scientist of the feelings, who often prevails over the man of greater intellectual ability, when both are after the same game.

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One's own Company.

OF all company our own is the best. Of all our acquaintances we are fondest of ourselves, for we make allowances where they do not. We know ourselves better than they know us or than we can know them. There is also more liberty where our own society is concerned. We can get away from it on the instant by taking up a book or talking to a stranger ; but sometimes, for long hours together, we are unable to escape from our kind. No man, then, need ever be bored by himself, although he cannot avoid being bored by others. He is monarch of his little kingdom, and can create imaginary subjects and slaves to adore him. Here are no hard facts, but dreams only ; no brutal disappointments ; no irreversible decisions. He turns his own wheel of Fortune and leaves Fate outside on the mat.

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Solitude is medicine for grief, and for world-weariness and bitterness of spirit a sweet repairer. Away from the noise of the crowd things fall again into their proper proportion ; perspective resumes its lawful sway, and peace reigns over all. The hills melt into the horizon ; we view great distances ; we see vast natural forces at work, calm, eternal, irresistible ; we are witness to the beauty of Nature's ordering, the grandeur of the solar system, the wonders of plant and insect life ; and the world of men, with their miniature interests, small ambitions, and mean satisfactions, sinks into insignificance and frets us no longer.

It is, therefore, no bad habit to spend a part of every year in solitude. Go into the desert, and there you will find a restorer for every weakness, a salve for every sorrow, an antidote for every fever, and a lesson for all presumptuous desires.

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Self-knowledge.

ALTHOUGH we know ourselves in some respects more intimately than others can ever know us, we are generally very ignorant as to the actual figure which we cut before the world. A man may have some physical or other peculiarity that he is almost unconscious of, but which may be the salient feature of his personality, the one dominant circumstance which will be remembered of him by those he loves and by the rest of his acquaintance, when everything he did for them or said to them has long been forgotten.

I know, for instance, the father of a family, honourable and upright—a pillar of the Church, the State, and of Society; and, what is more, a man of the world and in affluent circumstances. Yet, if he can save half-a-crown when he is entertaining a friend,

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he will be sure to do so. Is he conscious of the impression that is left by this habit upon all his neighbours, a relatively unimportant trait that colours their opinion of him, first and last, whatever sphere of his activities be under discussion, and whenever his name is spoken?

I have in mind another individual, kind-hearted, well-intentioned, a staunch friend, and an able man; but, unfortunately, a prig without any humour or tact—and men fly from him. Is he, again, aware of these handicaps in life's race that affect fundamentally the feelings of all who come in contact with him?

But, just as it is possible to survey any one in this manner, dispassionately and deliberately—to mark his characteristics, to note his peculiarities, to weigh his defects, to assess his value, to see him and to estimate him as a whole, and to assign him his place in the order of things—so is it possible, with a slight effort, to step outside oneself, to stand away for a time from one's own conscious indi-

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viduality, and to take a long look at the fellow whom we call 'I.' It may humble our pride and humiliate some dear delusions, but it teaches us a knowledge of self that we can never attain so long as we jealously lock ourselves up in the closet of our own personality.

We must regard ourselves as objects, not merely as subjects. Stand, therefore, away from yourself, you who desire a more intimate knowledge of what you are. Free yourself from the subjective network in which you are entangled, and scan yourself as the world scans you. All your spiritual struggles, your temptations and ideals, all that passionate inner history that makes you of such absorbing interest to yourself, is nothing to them. The great canvas, which you have so devotedly painted in with your own portrait, they cannot see; your good resolutions they are unaware of; those little achievements that you hug to yourself when you ask your own spirit whether you have been a success or a failure in life, they have never heard of, or have forgotten.

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Therefore, throw open these prison-doors of your Holy of Holies, and stand outside in the light of day with them, and look upon yourself—the handiwork of a lifetime. Of the flattering portrait which you drew there is scarcely anything to be seen. The brilliant colours have faded, and in their place there are others of soberer hue. The beauty of the outlines has almost disappeared. It is now quite a different figure, plainer, less noticeable, smaller, perhaps coarser. Defects that you were almost unconscious of disfigure the picture like blots of ink ; and certain redeeming qualities, that you had always held cheap, are the only relief to what, on the whole, to the eye of the impartial observer, is a commonplace, imperfect, and depressing composition.

When you re-enter your little temple, where then will all your pride be, and the comforting vanities and satisfactions of many a long year past ? You will have taken the world's measure of yourself. But, if former hallucinations have melted away ; if your pride is bruised and self-importance abated,

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you will have gained a fuller knowledge of what you are. You will also have a deeper insight into the world of men about you. You will know that you are not the only victim of self-ignorance. You will be sure that they too are packed with self-delusions. You will know, in spite of the actual figure they cut, what elegant raiment of self-appreciation and appraisalment they are weaving, what rare visions of themselves they are beholding, what pride they are taking in their fictitious treasures. This you may be sure they will be doing at the very moment that you are seeing them as they really are.

The Blaming of Fortune.

HOW ready are we to blame Fortune for our own failures ! Yet every man is the builder of his life, the architect of his own monument, the writer of his own epitaph. He may grieve to-day on account of the world's neglect, the loss of old regard, disgrace, disaster, destitution — what not ; but if he look back upon the long chain of his actions, somewhere among the links he will find the one forged by himself—the initial flaw that weakened irremediably all the rest. There is no one who does not know this, and few who will admit it. The spite of Fortune is what we rage against amid the consequences of our follies, and so we apply balm to the remorse which otherwise might be too hard for us to bear.

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Self-expression.

THE most desirable achievement in a man's life is not so much happiness as adequate self-expression, and this can sometimes only be attained in agony or in sorrow, as by a Christ or Joan of Arc, and other martyrs to ideals. But to be a cobbler, or financier, or attorney, when you have the divine gift of vision, of conjuring the spirit of beauty from a block of marble, or creating other loveliness for the world's perpetual delight, is to be a failure, whatever content and material prosperity may be yours. Complete self-expression is the ideal destiny of each of us, as in the case of every other natural thing. A rose may grow to perfection in a deserted garden, and never be seen by human eye, yet being perfect in its development it can do no more, whereas another, that buds in the public view and rots when it should bloom, can scarce do less. Recognition of achievement is a reward some-

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times withheld, or late in coming, or only partial in the end, but this for the individual is of no concern. As with him, so is it with nations. As the demands of the family have to submit at times to his ideals, so do weaker races have to submit to the ideals of a stronger one. The man obeys his genius, and domestic conventions and the claims of family life go by the board, just as a nation obeys its particular genius and the wills of its weaker neighbours bend to its power.

The doctrine of self-expression is therefore ruthless, just as Nature herself is ruthless; and a man must determine for himself, and at the outset, whether he will seek the fullest development of the best that is in him, at the sacrifice of other things, and at the price, maybe, of affronting jealous and vengeful opinion, or be satisfied with a crippled, incomplete self-expression, or, perchance even, with none at all. That he should be born into this dilemma is one of the jests of Fate.

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Self-justification.

THERE come periods in some men's lives when all things turn to gall and worm-wood. It is then that the courageous spirit tries to divert this bitter force from self-destruction, or revenge upon the world, into some achievement that will justify the existence of Fate's poor victim. That a life of trial and mortification should end in naught but a handful of grey ash is intolerable to a brave and rational being. He must leave behind some memorial of himself, some small but genuine fragment of abiding value, not so much for his own glorification, as to redeem his suffering—the crucifying hours of hatred and despair—to compensate him for what otherwise would be but a cruel and merciless experience.

This burning of the body, of the heart, of self-consciousness, in the furnace of life,

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with nothing to show for it but a little heap of cinders, is an unendurable thought. And therefore it is that many a kingly achievement has been wrought in pain, that might never have been accomplished if effort had had a gentler nurse.

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Thorns in the Flesh.

EVERY man, you may be sure, whose instincts on the whole are not anti-social, has a thorn in the flesh. In some it may be a disgraceful sexual impulse, in others an ungovernable craving for strong drink, or, again, a treacherous temper, jealousy, cowardice, deceit, a stirring to revenge. These are but a few, for the catalogue of mortal infirmities is beyond all human ken. Pity these men who are sometimes tortured their lives through by their frailties, and escape from their torment only by death. It is often agony when with these thorns they stab their own quivering flesh, and afterwards when in bitterness of spirit they strive to pluck them out. There are long, cruel spikes as well as smaller ones, jagged, ugly, poisoned, some of them piercing into the very vitals, the heart, the brain, all that makes life otherwise endurable.

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Learn to be sorry for these poor, self-tortured victims, as you are sorry for yourself under like conditions, and you will have learnt much humanity. For they are victims first and evildoers afterwards, just as you were a short while since and may be again ; and the greater your knowledge of the circumstances of each, the deeper will be your pity. Hatred, contempt, disgust, derision will melt away and compassion will take their place. For this reason, because of the pitifulness and pathos, the indwelling sadness of our human lot, the wisest men have not been the merriest, and all the world's greatest work has been serious.

If you can feel compassion in your heart for him who has wronged you from malice, or pride, or personal ambition, or some other poisoned motive ; if your own hurt seem after all to be secondary ; if pity for him, self-wounded as he is, overbears your natural anger at the harm which he may have done you, you will have learnt some of the wisdom of the ages and shall live in greater peace.

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Good Company.

IT is a greater service to amuse than to instruct people. They are always grateful for the one, and generally impatient of the other. And their instinct is a sound one ; for the man who is full of information and anxious to impart it is not infrequently a public nuisance, and there are few inflictions that human flesh can less easily endure than a well-informed and conscientious bore. In fact, any one of us would as soon have a burglar to stay in the house. You would only have to keep an eye on the plate in the one case, but in the other there would be no hope for you ; nothing but laceration of nerves and increasing paralysis of every moral instinct so long as he remained under your roof. But how our hearts warm to some one who can entertain us with his company, whether he be an author long since dead or a man in the flesh ! He

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refuses to take the world as it is. He moulds it anew in front of us, and if he mingles a little precept with his entertainment on the sly, as though he were doing it unconsciously or by inadvertence, we readily forgive him. But with what a chilling contraction of our very marrow do we regard the man who is always unloading his mental lumber for our benefit ! We would rather he sunk the whole of it in mid-ocean. It might be the wisdom of Solomon, but we would sooner lose it than listen to him.

On the other hand, he who entertains us by the quality of his wit is a friend indeed. We treasure the small change of his conversation as a miser his gold. We gather him to our bosom almost as a saviour, for he can cure us of our maladies when half the medicos in Harley Street have given us up ; and his way of putting things and looking at them, his quips and his humour, are a better preservative of health than the whole of the British pharmacopœia.

Let us then be grateful to those who are

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good company, for that kind of company is 'good' indeed. It humanises the feelings, uplifts the heart, makes life worth living at moments even when the fiend of care is prowling in the background. Let us be grateful to those who can amuse us, for it is all that many of us can render in the way of reciprocity. They set not out to preach, or at least their pulpits are invisible and their texts unspoken, but they are natural philosophers and exponents of the art of life. Though some of them may be over the border-line of respectability or decorum, they belong to a fraternity as select as that of the Academy of France. They are a perpetual reminder of one of the world's eternal truths—that our circumstances after all do not really so much matter; that in the same way that a potter can fashion his clay, so can we, with the help of these genii of the spirit, whatever be our fortune, transform the little world in which our daily activities revolve. It is our own fault if we seize not the occasion when the chance is ours; for as we while away the

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hours with some one who is good company, who groups the kaleidoscopic particles of experience in the way we like to see them, this is the lesson that we are being taught under the guise of amusement all the time.

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On Revisiting Places.

IF a man desires a clear perspective of the result of his life's journey, he can employ a method which will hardly fail, if not to give satisfaction, at least to establish a basis for truth. Let him revisit some well-known spot after a long absence—the busy little market-town or quiet country village with which he was so familiar, and where he was so intimately known, perhaps twenty years ago. Let him stay there for a while, lingering amid well-remembered scenes and scanning familiar faces, and when he retires occasionally into himself in some secluded corner of its neighbourhood, he will obtain a juster perspective of the past and present than in almost any other fashion.

For he will then be able to discern how far his earlier expectations have materialised, dreams become realities, resolutions and am-

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bitions facts, and promise fulfilment. He will read in the faces of his old acquaintances (that mirror of his reputation) whether he has climbed the ladder of success or remained at the foot of it; and when, in this solitary contemplation, he bridges the gulf of years, recollecting the surge of his youthful ambition and those pent-up energies that he yearned to loose, he will be able to calculate, as against the fair promise of the past, the amount of realisation that there has been on the whole.

It may be that he has leapt even beyond his wildest hopes; that he is richer, more honoured, more powerful, happier, more useful than he or any one else dreamed he ever would be. His former comrades may be flattered by their old connection with their distinguished friend and flock to pay him court, and his heart may swell when he thinks of the many obstacles surmounted, of the esteem of the world gradually won, of the favours that Fortune has lavished upon him, of the crest of the wave that has borne him thus safely and victoriously to shore.

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This, indeed, is an exhilarating experience, and as he stands alone and views the familiar spire, or ancient tree, or crowded street, a sense of gratitude steals upon him and of goodwill. The pictures of the past and present are complete. They are before him in panorama, with every detail of shadow, background, figures, colouring, and grouping clearly defined, and with no interposed landscape or portraiture to interfere with the contrast and distract attention.

But it well may be that the contrast is of a different character. The last time he was here, he swam in hope. The ball of the future lay at his feet. There was nothing, he believed, that, given the chance, he could not achieve. Pride, confidence, the splendid opportunities of youth, a fair and fortunate start, and an engaging personality made him a little centre of admiration, almost of romance, for himself and others. Everything pointed to a prosperous—indeed, brilliant future, to progressive and honourable success. In secret he even cherished thoughts of imperishable

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fame. He was prepared to climb rugged paths to win it, to toil unweariedly to deserve it, and was intolerant of inferior and commonplace aspirations.

And what about it all now, after twenty years, as his eyes rest upon the landmarks of that glorious fairy-time? The dreams of renown and all the other visions are dying, if not already dead. He is like a lark caught in a snare. He is up against realities, and they are brutal and stark naked. The broad river that floated his great vessel of ambition has dwindled to a trickling rivulet. Most of his ideals are destroyed, some by his own hand. His resolutions have long since gone to pieces, deserted in despair; first of all been cracked, then repaired; then broken and mended again; then shattered and once more reunited; then finally shivered into atoms and abandoned for ever. The enchanted palace that he built, the gorgeous robes, the triumphant career have turned out to be the most ordinary bricks and mortar, the plainest homespun, and a daily, unnoticed, uninteresting round of events. He

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would not have believed in the possibility of it a score of years ago, and could not have borne the revelation.

To-day he is face to face with the visions of his youth and the accomplished anti-climax, and although he has learnt in the interval that too much is not to be expected of life, the two pictures are side by side and hurt him all the same. He gazes at the chasm between what is and what might have been. He can measure to a nicety the desert that stretches between the promise and the performance, the assurance of success and the reality of failure ; and—what makes his trial the more bitter—while he can now calmly estimate how many of his former expectations were pitched too high for all human probability, he also knows how much of the actual disillusionment has been his own fault.

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Summer Woods.

THE charm of the woods has never been adequately sung. The flashing rivers, the meadows, the waterfalls, the sublime mountain ranges, the rolling downs, the changing heavens, the wheat-fields, the un-resting sea — have all had their chroniclers and devotees. Every aspect of their loveliness has been limned a thousand times, in poetry and prose, and their beauty consecrated in unnumbered hearts. But the quiet, retired recesses of the woods have been comparatively neglected, as though a certain measure of self-advertisement were necessary, even in Nature, for due recognition. Yet amid the stillness and peace of a wood there may be more magic than in any fountain, or lake, or hill, or golden corn.

There is a little sandy path in one of the southern counties of our own England — a

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winding, sheltered, unfrequented track, that alternately gently climbs and as gently drops for about a mile and a half through a fairy scene of woodland. A few farm cottages, sparsely sprinkled on the outskirts, alone proclaim the settled neighbourhood of man, and all about lies a smiling landscape of waving crops and purple heather. It is not as some woods are, all of one grain and growth, planted by the same hands at about the same time, with a view to profitable felling after a lapse of years. But it is as various and uncommercial as the shifting clouds, and yet, with all its changefulness and diverse beauty, enfolds a personality which is indivisible and never alters with its moods.

In this short mile and a half of unpretentious pathway, over-arched here and there by the foliage of the higher trees so as to form roofed and pillared aisles with vistas opening into vivid greenery, all that is lovely in woodland scenery is spread before the eye. A delicate hazel coppice of a few years' growth; then a sweep of heather fringed with gorse

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and yellow tormentil, and dignified by some birch saplings that stand in it ankle-deep, like knights in silver armour; then a plantation of dark-stemmed chestnut. Further on there is a clearing where the charcoal-burners have been at work and left their hut of turf and boughs behind them, and here, in the open, are a few Scotch firs with blood-stained bark, silhouetted against the sky, and an ancient beech, blasted, without a leaf.

Then we cross a tiny stream with two giant fungi growing at its edge, pink and lovely, yet poisonous; and then a piece of marshy ground with its bed of reeds and alder; and on and up under some mighty monarchs of the wood, vast, black, twisted oaks and sombre, immemorial yews, older and blacker still, among them. After this, in wild, natural sequence, as it were, some low brush-wood and coarse shrub, a birch covert, thick-set oak stubs, graceful larch, tall, brittle spruce, impenetrable thickets of thorn and briar, yet another little singing rivulet, and forests of fairy bracken. And amid all these the dance

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of jewelled butterflies, the murmur of innumerable bees, the pipe of invisible birds, the tinkle of unseen waters, the scent of honeysuckle, the breath of the wind in the tree-tops, the deep blue of the sky between the branches, the shafts of light upon the moss, and the dead leaves of yester-year.

But a summer's night is the time to drink the full magic of the wood. Let us go there together. It may be one of our last opportunities, and the chance may not come again. Here is the clearing, with the charcoal-burner's hut. There is a large patch of heather and bracken on one side and some ash underwood on the other. For concealment's sake we will sit on a log by the pile of faggots which are to be taken later on for winter firing. The dead beech under the moon looks gaunt and ghastly as it holds out its withered arms, and the night air is stirring in the pines. This is the hour of the bat and owl, of moths, mice, rats, weazels, and other sleepless things. A white owl floated past us, only a few feet from the ground, as we were coming here – soundlessly,

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like a spirit, disembodied and companionless ; and small inky bats flitted round us in the gloom of the yews.

But, above all, this is the hour of the night-jar ; the goat-sucker they also call him, and the churn-owl. He it is who, with his consort, is the true magician of this summer night. We must be as still as though carved out of ebony, or they will see us. There are a pair of them ; one is wheeling over some undergrowth and among the larger trees. Sometimes he glides into the open and hovers, fluttering noiselessly, over the heather bloom. Surely it can be no bird. It is a spectre, some poor human soul, released for a space from its imprisonment to fly among the woods at night. The trees, too, are becoming phantasmal and the ferns are shivering. See ! he has suddenly settled upon the path—black, immobile, watchful—but we must have breathed or stirred an eyelid, for he is off again in a flash. A glade on the right has swallowed him up. Hist ! there is his mate calling to him from a limb of the stricken beech, crouch-

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ing along it, motionless, like a piece of the sapless stick itself. Did you ever hear a sound like it? The bubbling of water is more comparable to the peculiar vibrant note than any other sound in Nature that I can think of, and yet how weak the comparison is. Unheard, it is incommunicable. There is an occasional change of pitch, a drop to a lower key, but otherwise it is continuous and tireless throughout these peaceful hours of the cloudless summer night, except when it is broken in upon suddenly by a short, passionate, guttural call beyond all mortal power to interpret.

What does it signify — this mysterious, persistent soliloquy, this echo of rippling, trilling, bubbling, gurgling water in the moonlit watches of the night? Whatever secret it may hold, it is the wood's chief spell at such a time, and, with the other mystic influences of the hour, produces a feeling of enchantment indescribable.

The hoot of the owl is a weird and melancholy cry; the nightingale pierces the heart

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with a pang, when with that haunting, long-drawn plaint, she seems to sing of lost loves and perished hope ; round the bat and the great moths cling the romantic secrecy of all nocturnal things ; but beneath the moon, on a still and radiant night, in a clearing of the summer woods, the master-wizard is the night-jar. There is no enchantment like his, as you watch him wheeling and hovering in the shadows and listen to the mystery of his unearthly song.

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Courage.

COURAGE is the noblest of all the virtues. The condemned murderer, who mounts the scaffold with firm and fearless mien, becomes almost a hero to the rabble who have gathered to see him die. The spy, who after running fearful risks is discovered and tried, and faces the shooting-party with a calm indifference to death, compels the admiration even of his enemies. And countless instances might be given where the badness of a deed or individual is almost purged of its evil when combined with a contempt for consequences and a brave, unfaltering heart.

Whence comes it that even the worst of crimes, if accompanied by great courage, loses in so large a measure the aspect of guilt? For this reason, that every man is superior to his circumstances, his spirit mightier than the chance that hems it in. It is not every one

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who is conscious of this ascendancy and able to exercise it; but he who does is of heroic mould and master of his fate. For courage is nought else but a contempt for the mock reality of circumstances. It is the spirit freeing itself from things material and despising the laws of cause and effect. There is no other human impulse so unpolluted by carnal considerations, so devoid of any idea of profit, so completely barren of an end in view. Although vice may make use of it, it is itself above reproach. With those emotional, universal appeals, worthy and unworthy, by which all humanity are from time to time affected, it has nothing in common. It is uninfluenced by thoughts of material gain, social duty, the pleasures of mutual affection, or bliss in a future life. The husk of mortal desires slips altogether from it; the laws of the understanding cease to apply; it has no explanation to offer itself; it does not reason; and therefore of all others it is the purest, least objective, and most spiritual. This has been unconsciously recognised in all ages, and,

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consequently, more unqualified honour is rendered to courage, and a richer meed of ungrudging admiration bestowed upon it than in the case of any other quality vouchsafed to man.

Courage inspires emulation, reconciles foes, redeems error, dignifies insignificance. It is a password in every clime for young and old. When the world was in her infancy it was the gold of her standard currency, and it remains so now that she is middle-aged. And when the race are nearing their end, it will still be their chiefest treasure, the coveted possession of a minority, among whom will be counted both good and bad, rich and poor, strong and weak, happy and afflicted—a rare and precious jewel that the destitute never part with nor the wealthy buy. A man may smirch his honour, desert his family, sell his country, betray his Church, rob his master, ruin his own peace, mutilate his talents, abandon his ideals and convictions—aye, lose all that he has—but if he has an intrepid heart, fortitude, courage, they will abide with him

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still, an inalienable heritage, unimpaired and unspotted amid every circumstance of shame or disaster.

Courage is of the fiery essence of the soul, immaterial and godlike, beyond vicissitude, untameable by temporal events, indifferent to Fortune and to Fate. This is why it is held in such especial honour, esteemed beyond all price, glorious above all other gifts that are given to the sons of men.

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The Sphinx of Personality.

HOW little do we know those whom we know best ! Does a mother know her son, or a servant his master, or a husband his wife, or a man his nearest friend ? And why should we expect to know them, when so often we know not even ourselves ? Your little boy, who is saying his prayers so charmingly at your knee, may be going to be a poisoner one of these days ; who, after torturing his wife through months of protracted, dreadful pain, will watch her last struggles without a particle of feeling for her heart-rending agony. Your trusted legal adviser, the staid and reputable man of business, to whom you were half ashamed to confess the little temptations to speculative investment that sometimes assailed you, is found one morning in his office with half his face blown away—a suicide, having gambled with and

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lost the securities of his clients. Your young wife, to whom you confided your inmost thoughts, who sat by the fire with you only a week since with her baby in her arms—an ideal picture, so you thought, of domestic felicity and innocence—leaves you for another man. Or, lastly, your next-door neighbour, whom you so heartily despised for a wastrel, a good-for-nothing, self-indulgent failure and hanger-on, who could scarce look you in the eye, saves a poor servant-girl from a burning house just as the roof is falling, and is disfigured and maimed for life—an unexpected hero.

These are no extravagant cases. We are all of us in the last resort enigmas to the rest of the world, for until usage, conventionalities, the apparel of our upbringing, are peeled from us, we are enigmas even to ourselves. A friend, whom I had always regarded as a wise and amiable fellow-creature, once told me with considerable concern the following tale. He had an old serving-man, who had worked in his house for forty years.

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There had never been a bitter or reproachful word between them. To all outward appearance, the relations between master and servant were perfect. No jar during all that long period had hazarded what apparently had been a complete union of interests and hearts. By the merest chance, a few casual sentences inadvertently overheard, he discovers one day that the old retainer for many years had hated and despised him. Which of us three was right in our estimate of my friend? He himself, or I, or the time-worn servant? Was the servant to blame or mistaken in his judgment? Did the master know that the antipathy was justified, or was he frankly deceived and taken by surprise? Or was I right in suspecting that the underlying cause must be some transitory misunderstanding—the employer, maybe, a little hasty or wanting in tact, or the employed a trifle over-sensitive?

It is this uncertainty, clouding all our experience of mankind, which should make us hesitate in our judgment of other people. They may be heroes when we think them

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craven, or vile when we respect them. For sometimes they know not even themselves. The occasion perhaps has not yet arisen for their genuine personality to assert or reveal itself, and until then they are mere pictures, daubed by other hands than theirs, tricked out by education, by tradition, by environment—selfless, and without a will. So that when the hour strikes at last for their truer revelation, we are puzzled by what we regard as the sphinx of their personality, which may have been comparatively simple all along, but overlaid by those ulterior, artificial, contradictory assemblages, which, for them as well as for us, hid it for the time from view.

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Poetry and Prose.

THE difference between Poetry and Prose is as the difference between Youth and Age, or the bubbling of a spring and the progress of a river, or between intuition and reflection. Poetry is the play of the intuitive ; prose, of the reflective powers of man. The former, therefore, is of the very fountain of our intellectual faculties, while the latter is part of their later life, when, in comparative repose, they broaden into lakes or sweep majestically to the sea. It is a difference, therefore, not of origin or matter, but of mood—the one impulsive, youthful, unself-conscious, pure ; the other sedater, more experienced and older, less unself-conscious ; also less pure, because carrying with its currents the *débris* of life. Poetry is thus the higher art, because the more original, the least polluted expression of the soul ; and it is also

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the rarer of the two, for the moments it can seize on are confined to the birth of the waters, as they well up from the spirit to start upon their downward history. Prose may almost be refined into poetry ; the waters purged of the drift that they have gathered on the way, and the more like poetry it becomes the better is it as prose. But poetry can never be improved by an admixture of the other. Once allow an infusion into poetry of these later scourings, and poetry it ceases to be. Some of Ruskin's passages may almost be read as poetry, and these are the best of all his writings. He set out to write prose, and all but wrote in the form of poetry, succeeding all the better in his original purpose. On the other hand, some of Wordsworth's pages, if written at all, should have been in the form of prose, and they are his worst work. He set out to write poetry, and practically wrote prose, and so failed altogether in his primary object.

Prose, again—and splendid, scholarly prose—can be written to order. A man with

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sufficient stores of information, who is perpetually practising his art, may sit at his desk and paint a brilliant portrait of Alexander the Great for an historical magazine. He may write without emotion and against time, but the result may be a picture that will live in literature. With poetry it is otherwise. More than in any other art you must wait upon the muse. It is no use to importune her. She will visit you, if at all, in her own hour, as unexpectedly as she deserts you, without warning, and often at seemingly unfavourable moments. No man ever wrote a lyric worthy of the name with the publisher waiting on the doorstep. And the reason is that the workings of Nature and the spirit are in their beginnings hidden from us. You feel the first sweet breath of Spring, and cannot account for it or recall it, but had you not been watching and waiting, you might not have felt it at all. It is gone; and though the subsequent procession of the seasons is proud and lovely, they are but a calculable and commonplace succession in comparison with that first inde-

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scribable birth which has departed for ever. In young blood this ferment of the spirit occurs oftener than when the years recede, just as a volcano throws up its flaming lava with less frequency as the centuries roll by, until the grey and lifeless scoria about it is the only witness to its vanished power. Indeed, nearly all the highest poetical efforts have been those of the comparatively young. And this is but natural, for they are closer to the source of life, to the vibrating, vital heart of things. They can feel the throb of its pulse and its fire in their veins. Soon the current of their days will cool, and become sluggish and contaminated, or choked with the traffic of cares and experience, and they will then stand upon the bank and contemplate it rather than feel it. In other words, they will think in prose rather than in poetry. This is why philosophy—a task for the reflective understanding—is no subject-matter for the poet; and why love, that ceases to be love when we reflect upon it, is the best of all.

As it is the highest art, so also is it the

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least remunerative. The market is so restricted, the recognition often so slow, that he would be a bold man to reckon on a crust of bread for every sonnet or lyric that he could write, however fine in quality they might prove to be. For since poetry is a spiritual birth, every true poem is a new venture from the hidden depths of life. Its unheralded and spontaneous origin is one of the features that constitute it poetry, and as it has issued from the unseen, and its advent is inexplicable and, maybe, unexpected, there is no rough and ready standard by which to judge it. Indeed, its novelty, its spiritual individuality, is a hindrance to its ready acceptance ; and years may pass before the flickering radiance in the heavens is recognised as a new star. But what is this to the man who can create—whose living offspring in their beauty and perfection are dearer to him by far than the breath of popular applause ? He is speaking by the mouth of a divine revelation. For the moment he is inspired ; he is a seer ; the vision is upon him,

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and all earthly things are of no account. What does it matter if he dies neglected? The universal has issued through him, and sublimed him, and turned his dross to gold. In this rapture of expression he has found exaltation rarer than any that the world can give or take away. He is independent of reputation, of fate or fortune; for he has drunk the cup of ecstasy and his heart is full of music.

Lastly, and following from this, poetry, having no material aim in view, is despised in general by the world at large. The journalist, the critic, the historian, even the novelist, are recognised components of an organized society, participants in its life, beneficiaries of its advantages. They are paid for their periodic output as a matter of business and deliver the dish demanded at the moment. But the poet has no such unchallenged and allotted place. He has no niche in the temple of worldliness. The city man ignores him, the countryman does not understand him, the politician smiles at him as crazy, the busy

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crowd has no time for him. Outside a small and esoteric company, he is looked upon as something astray from the healthy and normal, almost as though he had been born a cripple, as out of relation with sublunary interests, a star-gazer and useless visionary. His virility is questioned, his sanity a matter of suspicion, his want of common-sense taken for granted.

But let not these things discourage you, dreamer of dreams! for poetry is its own reward, and, like the cardinal virtues, an end in itself. You stand at the fountain-head of all our longings, of all our passions, of all our imaginings. You alone can feel them in their purity and express them for us in the fulness of love.

Confidants.

ADMIT no confidants to the secret ambitions of your life, though confederates may be employed on contributory enterprises to pave the way to the main goal. For, although it is possible that they may help you even in the principal venture, they will be more likely to hazard your chances. If you want to be Prime Minister, keep it to yourself.

There are treacherous, indiscreet, and overzealous associates—all equally dangerous to the ambitious man. In fact, the golden rule is to trust no one too much, for human nature can scarcely support a complete surrender of another's confidence. The time may come when temper or interest will overbear loyalty, and the whole fabric of years will tumble to the ground. If, however, you are obliged to have accomplices, then cherish them that they may cherish you. If you are forced to bare

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yourself to them, let them see themselves in the very fibre of your loving thoughts, so that they may be assured that you would rather fail in your attempt than lose their friendship or their dear society. Or, as an alternative, so entwine their interests with yours that, if you fall, they must go with you. There is no other security than these.

Good faith, loyalty, gratitude, duty are apt to be mere catch-words, void of any substance, when the pressure of interest or temper is brought to bear against them. We see good faith give way to wounded feelings, loyalty to bribes, gratitude to a prospect of richer favours elsewhere, while duty has the weakest hold of all. Flattery may succeed in binding associates to you for a time, but the hour comes when it stales, or when a more cunning flatterer appears upon the scene. As for services, they are often forgotten when a few hours old, or, as they gradually come to be piled up, each new one appears but insignificant beside the mountain of your previous ones, of which it forms so small a part.

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Therefore, whether your associate be a greater or a lesser man than yourself, expect not too much from human nature. A word, a look, a letter may destroy in a moment the labours of a lifetime. Wounded vanity remembers no debt. An error in tact may blast the virtue of a thousand claims. A single fault, venial, indiscernible almost in its effect, may discount all the successes, all the sacrifices, all the co-operation of a dozen years. He, therefore, is more likely to be happy who is without any great personal ambition, neither standing alone with it, mistrustful of his kind, nor confiding his secret to the care of others.

As in great ambitions, so is it in the ultimate peace of one's own mind.

The man most to be envied at the moment is the lucky one ; the most successful over a longer period, he who can forecast the chances of the future ; but the happiest in the end is the possessor of a wise philosophy. The first escapes accidents, just as one man out of a regiment may be sole survivor of a bloody fight. The second calculates probabilities and

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lays his plans accordingly. He is of those who are 'the lords and owners of their faces.' The last takes life as he finds it. He gains more than he expected, and loses less than he feared. To him ambition is the emptiest of bubbles, and disappointment a natural contingency; life but a brief, inexplicable span, a few racing hours of duty, pain, and pleasure, where nothing sufficiently matters to grieve over for long. It is a morning, midday, and evening shut in by darkness at either end; the same for all humanity, for kings and beggars, where repining is out of place when the moments fly so swiftly.

But the greater part of humanity are outside these three categories, being either unfortunate, or wanting in foresight, or without the consolations of a calm philosophy. They are born perhaps in poverty, or with some hereditary taint, or thrown when callow into vicious company; or they may have no sense of their own interests. They can advise a friend and make his fortune, but so mismanage their own that the day will come

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when he will be ashamed to be seen abroad with them. Or, lastly, they have no philosophy, and fret against fate, until those about them—their dear ones, their very selves—are worn past endurance and yearn for a release.

It is, therefore, partly a matter of temperament, partly also of circumstances over which we may have no control, which decides whether comparative happiness and success, or their dark opposites, are to be our lot in life. It holds good of all professions and all ranks, from that of a royal duke to a rag-and-bone picker. Accomplices can do nothing for us here. We are as isolated in this last resort as we are upon our death-beds, when the room is crowded with those who have gathered to see us off; when our last and lonely journey is about to begin; when nothing can be done for us, and none can accompany us across the frontier.

This being so, it is well for those of us who are able, to learn to walk alone; to admit confederates neither to the secret of

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one's chief ambitions nor to the inner sanctuary of one's peace of mind. They may fail you in the first case from one cause or another, and leave you to find your own salvation if you can ; but in the second they cannot help but disappoint you, however good their will. For, while material ends may be achieved for you by the collaboration and interest of others, happiness is your own creation—a flower that springs from your own breast, which is fed by your own heart's sap, and blossoms in spite of every apparent disadvantage. Of this none can rob you. No traitor can betray you unawares ; no alien interference can mar the bloom of the plant, for its roots are in your very life and its buds are everlastingly opening to view.

The moral, then, is this : that, since self-consciousness makes man a rational subject, a personality, and in large measure, therefore, a lonely animal, he should train himself in matters relating to his ultimate happiness to rely upon himself. For in these success will be more likely to crown his wishes if, as in

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those pertaining to worldly ambition, he keeps his own counsel, and so orders his secret scheme of life that no vicissitude can rob him of his treasure or violate the sanctuary of his inward peace.

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Style.

THE difference between first-rate and inferior composition is this: in the one, the words cling to the thought, as a well-fitting garment clothes the body. In the other, there is either the strain of the thought to avoid exclusion from the utterance, or it is overshadowed by it and more or less lost to view. In other words, a writer of genius expresses what he has to say with complete exactness; while a craftsman of second-rate talent, though his feelings may be equally alive, makes use of an agent unsuited to their content, and, the reader being aware of a lack of correspondence, æsthetic disappointment is a sure result. In the first case, the framework is so adapted that the writer's emotions can be incorporated so as to inform every part; whereas, in the second, it is either too constricted or has more capacity than they

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can make use of. That is, either it embodies a portion only of his message, and the remainder is left outside and missed by the reader, or what he wants to say vivifies but a part of the fabric of the language, and is lost in the interior which it fails to fill.

For just as it is bad art to overcrowd the chambers that you have prepared for your thought, so it is even worse to leave them half-empty. For insignificant authorship is nothing but the introduction of trifling matter into a mansion designed for the reception of an honoured guest. Futility, insincerity, vulgarity take up but little room in a building destined for noble uses, and the palace and the temple are left for the eye of the reader almost tenantless—robbed, as they are, of the pulsing life that should have been theirs.

But the author himself, composing in the flush of feeling, is often unaware of this. His emotion, so real to himself, is his first interest, the suitability of its articulated form too apt to be neglected. He is inclined to attribute to the framework the precise capa-

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city and shape required, and years may elapse before he recognises either the voids he has left or the insufficiency of scope with which he started. Indeed, it is not what he says and feels that so much matters. What matters is that they should coincide and be in harmony; that all he wants to say should be found perfectly fitting into the receptacle of language, his own mould fashioned by his own pen. A simple conception, simply but exactly housed, is beyond compare better than a finer one, half of which is left on the doorstep; better also than a finer one which is dwarfed by surroundings that are too big for it.

This is the secret of style, from Sophocles to Shakespeare, to Goethe, and others. A wise author decides with what scheme of architecture he can most closely assimilate his thought. It may be a cathedral, castle, manor house, or cottage, or a mere shanty or lean-to; or it may include them all. But his primary business is to make up his mind, whatever be the volume of his consciousness

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at the moment, not so much to try to express it to the full, as to accommodate it to the particular mould of which he is a master. If he succeeds in this, he is perfect in his art; and this very perfection, this fitness, will at once raise him above all those who are second-rate in every art and every age, and place him, according to his stature, among the chief literary craftsmen of the world—will raise, too, by reason of this perfection, the simplicity of a humble theme to a rank far beyond its own.

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The People.

IN studying the forces of life as applied to mankind, the great body of the world's poor afford a wider field for investigation, because a broader canvas for the hand of Nature to work upon, than the narrower dimensions of those other orders which, from various causes, have been raised to the upper levels of the human family. As this first great class preponderates in numbers so immeasurably above the others, it is from it that the averages and extremes of intellectual and moral range should be taken. It is in this majority, in the main bulk of the people, that the strongest impulses are to be found. It is here that the voice of Nature is loudest, the passions more vehement, and the spirit of life intenser than in any of the lesser distributions of society. In this vast community the shallowest and profoundest intellects, the most

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abandoned wretches and the noblest heroes have their home. Where the battle for existence proceeds in all its fierceness day by day, talents are more exercised and natural parts provided with a stronger incentive than in the circles of the unemployed. Indeed, the struggle of exalted minds after noble, and that of base minds after unworthy ends, this great contest for bread and glory that never ceases among the people, forms a picture by a master-hand to which all the galleries of luxury have nothing comparable to display. As the whole energy of the poor is directed to maintaining their very existence, and that of the rich to exploiting their possessions with prestige, the mass of the people can appreciate their own interests more clearly than those can do it for them upon whom Fortune has lavished her gifts. The workers have their lives to fight for, others frequently little else than their pleasures to pursue. The former, consequently, have a deeper stake in restraining their own passions, while custom and growing hardihood more easily reconcile them

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to their lot. Although, therefore, the greatest extremes of impulse are seen in the majority of the common people, it is in that class that we find, on the whole, a more complete harmony between the passions on one side and destiny on the other than in any other of the world's groups. In order to study the even balancing of these two forces, it is thus to the poor rather than the rich that we should turn. For the mass of the people are more or less unconsciously constrained to moderate the violence of their desires in face of a destiny that would crush them if it were too recklessly opposed. For these reasons, the voice of the people is generally the voice of truth, and their instinct a sounder standard for the guidance of statesmen than all the sagacity of philosophers and wise men. There is hence the imprint of simple greatness upon the faces of the common people, and a stamp of natural genius in the rugged lines of poverty, marks which, in the bulk, gradually disappear from the lineaments of those who live at their ease.

Like all prudent husbandmen, Nature puts

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her greatest faith in the greatest labour, and entrusts her vital interests to the producers rather than the consumers of the world's wealth. But men labour in order to win the object of their affections, and indulge those affections in order to alleviate their toil. The destiny of the people, therefore, is to labour, and one of their affections an ultimate release from that toil. In this principle is hidden the fountain of all the other affections of mankind. They are continually looking forward to an eventual release from the various trials of their existence. To-day they are restless, that to-morrow they may win repose; and, just as the scheme of life is being carried on for some secret purpose under the direction of an unknown force, so does every man devote all the energy of his being towards the attainment of a quiet liberty, and the construction of the temple of his peace.

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The Classic in Literature.

AS the Essay takes the place of honour in the field of prose, so does the Lyric hold it in that of poetry. The diamond, the most brilliant of gems, is distinguished above all others because, within so small a compass, it imprisons so great a store of imperishable and concentrated fire. So does the Essay likewise, at its best, enfold a treasury of riches in a little boundary, more wealth and light in proportion to its size than in the case of any other form of prose composition ; for every word sparkles like a facet with its own fire and brilliance. This is its chief quality and claim to immortality. Its capacity, seemingly so slight, is packed and loaded with value. It is like a gem sculptured by a loving artist, lasting, graceful, of masterly workmanship ; or a mosaic so exquisitely compacted and designed that the parts are lost in the picture

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of the whole ; or one of those Greek intaglios, graven as by the hand of Nature, and as though of inevitable birth, created, like Athene, from the brain of Zeus.

It is different with its companion star. The Lyric, at its best, contains as its primary distinction a wealth of music in a little body, more of this magical accompaniment in proportion to its size than in the case of any other kind of versification. This is not to say that the Essay can afford to be inharmonious or the Lyric without matter or meaning. But a concentration, as opposed to a diffusion, of significance in the Essay, of music in the Lyric, are the indispensable features of these two modes of artistic expression.

It is these requirements that make a perfect essay or lyric of the rarest occurrence in the world of letters, and, when satisfied, ensure them a better chance of survival than any other type of literary endeavour. Some of Bacon's Essays, for instance, and a lyric or two of that time, will, in all probability, outlive the best specimens of all the remaining forms of

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prose and poetry with which the last four centuries have been crowded. For they will be read and quoted. What profit is there in being hall-marked as a classic, if you are never opened from one year's end to another; if you merely repose with decorum upon a bookshelf, catalogued but cobwebbed, honoured but untouched? Who now reads the *Ecclesiastical Polity* or *Novum Organum*, or fifty other so-called classics? To live in any sense at all, you must do more than wrap yourself in leather with your face to a wall. You must be in men's hands and on their tongues. You must live in their hearts. But to live in their hearts, you must be present to their minds, and to be there, you must be quotable. There must be a concentration of truth or harmony in you, for that will be remembered when an equivalent volume of either of those precious qualities, distributed intermittently over a larger area, will have long been forgotten.

This, then, is the ultimate test of a 'classic'—its universal and permanent adaptability for

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quotation. And, if we come to think of it, that is as it should be. For the great gift which has been allotted to man, which exalts him above the brutes, is the gift of speech. It is that which makes him human, enables him to reason, to concert schemes for developing new powers and improving his condition, to effect far-reaching and novel changes, to step outside instinct, habit, and tradition. It is that which makes it possible for him to afford and to attract consolation, to convey the secret of his ideals, to focus his personality, to persuade, to record, to instruct, to command.

This is the possession of humanity which lifts us out of the dust and turns our faces to the stars ; which, in its result, makes us god-like, rather than animal, of the order of spirits, rather than of beasts. For language is the tapestry into which the ideas are worked. Without it, they would be discontinuous as well as incommunicable. They could not be arrested or fixed in the mind. There would be no medium in which to knit them into a

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picture, no stepping-places from one to another, and therefore no reasoning. They would merely jostle without coherence or relation, and lacking these there could be no reflection, and consequently, as we understand it, no self-consciousness. Language, indeed, is the vital principle of intelligent thinking, as distinguished from that consciousness which never rises superior to a mere agglomeration of impressions of sense.

Is it not, then, fitting—nay, in the natural order of things—that wheresoever speech is well-nigh perfect, clothing a subject worthy of its beautiful form, and being, as it then is, the highest example of that noblest gift which constitutes man a human being, it should abide in the heart and memory of humanity as an expression of its very self? The Lyric and the Essay are the only two forms of literary invention where language can attain, and throughout them maintain, its utmost perfection. But whenever the essential characteristics of these twin achievements make their appearance, whether in the epic, the

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drama, the history, the novel, or the public speech, comparatively dispersed and attenuated though they then must be, the composition proportionately assumes the dignity of a 'classic' and takes up its home in the remembrance of men.

As the Earth grows older, the test will become more and more exacting. Unable, as in the days of Scaliger, to exhaust the world's literature, the discriminating public of 2500 *Anno Domini* will be constrained to pass over much that is admirable, and to deal with the very finest only of the productions of each century. There will be an increasing massacre of all the remainder, or rather an enforced neglect, followed by gradual oblivion and ultimate death. The only chance of life will be for the perfect form of words, enclosing its maximum of meaning or sweet sound.

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Greed.

BEWARE of the love of money. Beware of the harpy, Greed. For if she fastens on you, she will drain your blood of its warmth, your heart of its sympathies, your mind of every interest but her own. At first, she will but raise her head at your feet, modestly, inconspicuously, a tiny root of ivy sending forth its delicate tendril that clings to your great bole for shelter and support. Her innocent leaves, scarce above the soil, will sparkle against your rude bark like emeralds in the sun. This is the beginning—a prudent thrift, forethought for dependents, a nest-egg for a hungry day.

But gradually she creeps up and on. Her lithe and sinuous stem swells and throws out feelers of its own. She spreads higher and higher, and round and about, exploring all the ramifications of your growth, until your

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foliage and hers seem to spring from the same wood and become inextricably mingled and interlaced. But your leaves wither and fall away, while hers are ever green, and in the winter of your days the only verdure about you is the rank vigour of the plant that is grappling with your life.

She is now a tree herself, with loins almost as thick as your own, and is crushing the sap out of you. Your top, that drank the fragrance of the summer breeze, is slowly dying, atrophied, starved of its vital current. Soon you are a dead encumbrance, only kept upright by the terrible embrace of those vampire arms. At length you fall, carrying all with you, having lost your value long ago, fit only for the fire, a shredded, rotten, worthless trunk.

Beware, therefore, of the lust of gold. For it is fatal, and in the end will stifle all the finer feelings of which humanity are the heirs. Gold is a loyal servant, but a treacherous, cruel mistress. She will change your very character, and, while preying upon your own life, will make you prey even upon those

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whom you loved best. There will be no loop-hole of escape for you. No appeal will soften your heart, no outrage will wound your sense of honour or love of country. Even faith will have to go. She will drive it out with all the other affections that swayed you before, until she reigns supreme, your only passion and your only thought.

A sufficiency of means is the best—a roof of one's own for shelter, wholesome food, warm clothing, and enough coin of the realm to ensure a decent proportion of leisure for the gratification of honest tastes. More than this is unnecessary for a happy life. Much more is injurious, in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, for mind and character. This may be armchair philosophy. For though the *summum bonum* is a contented spirit, who is there among the many myriads of human beings who is completely satisfied with his competence, and does not yearn for a trifle more? Who is there with an income adequate to meet all reasonable needs, who does not want to see it doubled, and doubled again?

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And so the ivy grows. The infant shoot thickens to the girth of a man's thigh, and, unless some arrest is made in its progress, strangles the tree of happiness, and finally brings it to the ground, a leafless and dishonoured ruin.

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Old Letters.

THERE are voices from the grave that soften the stoniest heart, when living hands stretch out in vain for sympathy. Stealing out of the past, these memories of irrecoverable days have a sadness and sacredness which the present moment rarely has. As we grow older, our homes become peopled with ghosts, ghosts of dear dead men and women, dead ambitions, dead longings and illusions; until, when we are very old and nearing our end, these spectral visitants, so great in number, become almost our only companions; and the flesh and blood around us, their doings and sayings, assume an air of comparative unreality, with but a slight hold on our interest and memory. It is in middle life, however, that these recollections affect us most, whilst we are still strong, looking forward to generous years of health and

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usefulness ; but when, at the same time, the spirits of the departed begin to gather about us in increasing numbers, and the transitoriness of all things earthly is more often brought to our minds.

So there comes a day when the accumulations of years in long-unopened drawers have of a necessity to be reduced, to yield the space required by a newer generation. Common-sense demands it, and compunction reluctantly agrees. So huge a store, if left undiminished and added to in the same proportion in the years to come, would, in course of time, become such an encumbrance to its custodians that the feeling of affection and reverence for these relics of the past would gradually give place to one of oppression. They have, therefore, at intervals, to be sifted and thinned. A choice has to be made, what to destroy and what to save ; whether to consign the records of a dearer, rather than those of a more distinguished, kinsman to the flames. In certain cases there is no choice. Some among us have held a precious packet of letters with

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a prayer on the wrapper, written perhaps with a faltering hand, to burn them unread. Who may guess their contents? Love-letters maybe; letters before marriage; letters in which there have been an outpouring of the soul, cries of distress, longings, hopes, fears, griefs, anxieties, long since dead. How slowly they burn in their faded covers as we watch their destruction, indulging in these imaginings!—the tender emotions of departed days, pathetic efforts to persuade, eloquent vows, pain from disappointment, self-revelation, passion, doubt. They seem so loth to die. Gradually the flames seize them—those wisps of yellowed paper, those cares now finally at rest, the secret confession, the autobiography of those vanished times. Soon there is nothing left but a waste of ashes. The flame has died away; one more link has snapped with the past; and the consciousness of mortality, of the fleeting nature of human interests, of the extinction of all this passionate emotion for ever, of our own similar and inevitable destiny, sweeps over us like a wave.

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The spirits of the dead may be watching us the while. We, poor wights, will shortly have to join them and witness the conflagration of our own hearts' messages. But as we think of these—our own aspirations and ideals—how dead they appear, even now! We hardly feel them to be a part of us. We seem for the moment to be dwelling in futurity, with our present far behind us. The burning of the letters was not only the destruction of the past. Our own passions now seem unreal, or of an earlier date than that of to-day. We feel almost as if we were a bygone chapter, with others contemplating our loves, our anxieties, and our fortunes. We have a vision of our descendants, when we ourselves shall have quitted the stage; and we catch a glimpse of the endless repetition of the same human story and the same circumstances, often so poignant to the individual, but so familiar to the eternal procession of the years. What value has ambition now?

As we sit by the fire, even the ashes of the paper are disappearing. Some have floated

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up the chimney, and the rest are being consumed and pulverised by the heat. In a little, nothing will be left of them. We shall be back once more in the present moment, and our dream will have vanished with the dust of long ago.

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The Sovereignty of Thought.

AS Christ revolutionised the ideal of conduct, and Shakespeare that of language, so did Immanuel Kant effect a transformation in the fairy realm of thought. Many efforts have been made in the last hundred and forty years to shake the pillars of his doctrine, but nothing that has been written during all that period has substantially or permanently affected his position. In fact, his main article of faith is more securely rooted to-day than at any time since his death. Just as our social system and literature are deeply coloured by the influence of the Christian founder and that of the great poet-dramatist, so is modern thought profoundly influenced, though many of us are unaware of it, by the blaze of light let in upon the machinery of intellect by the little wizened thinker of Königsberg nearly a century and a half ago. Goethe, no mean philosopher

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himself, said that after finishing the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he felt as though he had stepped into a lighted room, and the same kind of feeling must have been experienced by many a reader who has taken the trouble to study it with care.

Kant's chief handicap is the novel and difficult nomenclature which he had to create to demonstrate his propositions and convey his meaning. In addition to this, he exacts the closest attention, for there is no verbiage about him to eke out a poverty of pith and argument. Every word, the most inconsiderable, is an indispensable link, and once the continuity of the chain is lost, even momentarily, the reader has to return upon his tracks to pick it up as best he can. For more than a quarter of a century he lectured and pondered before putting pen to paper to write his masterpiece ; but then he wrote it at a gallop, as his other duties permitted. It was complete in his head before he settled to the task, and as there were no literary embellishments to this mighty intellectual achievement, given

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the leisure and physical strength, he could have composed the whole great treatise at a sitting, without the slightest hesitation or mental strain.

What, then, is this doctrine that has been garbed in as many languages as *Hamlet*, and concerning which, if we take account of the relative dates of their appearance, as many criticisms have been published as in the case of the Scriptures? Compendiously, it is this—that the spatial and temporal form which objects take for us is that imposed upon them by the laws of our own thought, and that the world, as we know it, is therefore *our* world, unconsciously fashioned and correlated by ourselves. A man's world is what he makes it. This, then, is literally true; not a mere formula from the schools of morality, nor even a half-truth, but a living fact of every instant of our waking lives, and to which there are no exceptions. Where now are the 'eternal' hills, the 'everlasting' sea, 'infinite' Time? Their everlastingness is in us. The human spirit outdwells them all, since they, in their

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manifold forms, issue alone from it. It is above them and yet of them, and they of it. On every one of them is the ineffaceable stamp of origin. They can only exist by reason of a thinking faculty. Is not this a stupendous, an ennobling thought? Instead of the imprisonment of the spirit amid material things that enchain it when it would be free, it is rather the consummate magician, weaving a universe out of invisible materials, master of sublime faculties, without whom, indeed, even the vision of a universe would cease to be.

This, stripped of technicalities and secondary issues, was Kant's thesis, proved to the satisfaction of generations of illustrious disciples; and which, in its main features, still holds the field among the foremost pioneers of modern speculation. That what is known as religious faith will ultimately suffer by this doctrine cannot be supposed, since one truth never destroyed another. As the years go by, rather ought it to have a contrary effect in discouraging the materialism which is at grips with society to-day, and in strengthening our

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faith in the immortality of the spirit, of which, from the pulpit, we are told we are the heirs, but which, in the absence of stronger proof, so many have found it so difficult to believe.

On the 12th of February, 1804, Immanuel Kant died, a little shrivelled mummy of a fellow, who for fifty years had never slept beyond the walls of the town where he was born ; who, to all outward appearances, was a pedagogue of pedagogues, as mechanical in his studies as he was precise and meticulous in all other relations and habits of life ; but who, from his modest quarters in his old-fashioned native city, quietly demolished the philosophic systems of the past and laid a lasting basis for succeeding thought.

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Sin and Virtue.

THERE is a passion for self-revelation in human nature, but no one dares lay himself quite bare. A man will unbosom himself to a stranger, entrusting him with some cherished secret of his heart, and from that moment will feel towards him as a friend, although they were unknown to each other yesterday, and will be parted to-morrow for ever. This yearning, which steals upon the coldest, most selfish of men, some time or another in their lives: this impulse to rip open that outer casing—the surface they exhibit to the world—is born of a consciousness of submerged fellowship, of ultimate comradeship with the rest of their kind, which they do not want to see perish altogether with the decay of their bodies and die unsuspected and unknown. And they are right in this, for the social instinct predominates in the

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majority over that which is in them of anti-social, or society would go to pieces. It is the feeling of this communal tie—a mystery they cannot fathom—which is always straining at the leash, and makes man on the whole a fretful and infelicitous creature amid the varieties of experience that beset him on earth. He is pulled one way and then another, and longs to justify himself before the tribunal of his own heart and some member of his kind. For let him but reveal to another this buried stirring of altruistic impulse, and he will have made a proclamation of faith, and can go before his conscience, not merely with a personal affidavit, but with a testimonial to character vouched by some one else.

This is the little store of merit of which he is conscious; the precious impulse that he yearns to reveal, but which can only be completely disclosed by discovering also all the accompanying counter-forces by which he is besieged, preventing him from ever publishing his confidences so as to give a genuine

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picture of the man as a whole. It is the instinct of unity implanted in all of us, the self-subordinating as against the individual impulse, which furnishes the standard of 'good' as distinguished from 'evil,' and in its warfare with the other constitutes the difference in conduct between what are known as 'sin' and 'virtue.'

For a man cannot isolate himself in spirit from the rest of the world. Nothing that he can do can fail to affect some one else in some remote or near degree. The whole of his personality is a texture of relationships, and if these were to cease, he also would cease with them as a self-conscious subject. In fact, ignore any one of them, and to that extent the law of his life is infringed, an attempt being made to mutilate the architecture of his very being. The more, therefore, of these relationships that he sees, the wiser will he be; the more he plans his conduct in obedience to them—acting, that is, less as an unrelated individual merely than as a member of a body corporate, as a part in indissoluble

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connection with the rest, the more will he be acting in accordance with truth. In short, he will be acting 'virtuously.' If, on the other hand, he wilfully ignores this aspect of himself, living as though he were an individual only, capable of standing outside these relationships, he will be acting in opposition to truth, and therefore 'sinfully.'

The first course is 'virtue,' and the other 'sin,' and although a man may pursue the latter over many years, he will know that he is out of tune with the scheme of things, in contradiction with the very machinery of his conscious life. He will feel the antagonism, and the time will come when he will long to reveal the basis common to all humanity, and confess the relationship denied for so long. It will be the social instinct crying for recognition. For wherever man is found, there is this eternal warfare between the individual and the race, and on the varying fortunes of the conflict depends the whole scale of conduct from 'good' to 'bad.' The last is perpetually trying to ignore the inter-relation-

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ship between all existing things ; the former, ever fighting to keep it in view. This struggle is at the root of all human action, and therefore, from time to time, when men are moved to lift the veil and reveal some of the impulses that hunt them down the paths of life, they dare not strip themselves too naked to the world—no, not the best of them.

For this reason autobiographies are of little value in estimating the personality of their authors. We may get an occasional peep below the surface, but the waters are generally agitated by all kinds of subsidiary motive, and the eye cannot pierce them. Complete revelation there will never be ; intimate revelations there sometimes are, but so fleeting, so partial, that the world in general can only obtain a glimpse of these depths of human nature and form but a perishable judgment of the character of men. Of this, however, we may be certain, that amid all the diverse forms of bliss vouchsafed to mankind, the happiest moment that man can enjoy is when he is conscious of complete

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self-abnegation ; of voluntarily surrendering all that he has for the sake of the rest of the world. As with the great Nazarene, the consciousness of universal and inseparable relationship is then at its highest. His sacrifice is in accordance with the truth of things. His soul is at peace, and that is his reward.

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Success.

HE alone has a right to be called successful who has led a happy life. This is the only and ultimate test. He may have garnered riches, or achieved honour, or triumphed over his enemies, or been a stranger to sickness; but if his conscience has haunted him, or his temper soured him, or grievous temptations have overborne and enslaved him, his life has been a failure, if not to the world, at least for him. For what is success before men compared with the contentment of an untroubled spirit? This is success, indeed; worth all the emoluments, dignities, fame, power that Fortune has it in her power to lavish. You may find a man whose wealth is such that the spending of it wisely would be a career in itself; yet he is racked by some ambition that he cannot satisfy; or another, who by tortuous intrigue has attained his

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ends, save the one that he covets most, now that he has the rest—the respect and goodwill of those about him; or perhaps a social favourite, born in luck's lap, with every circumstance seemingly conspiring to cheat Sorrow of her prey, but with a secret passion turning all his joy to ashes; or even a great artist, with the world at his feet, but tormented by a morbid sensitiveness to the barbs of the critics.

Success is only to be measured by a man's own estimate of his happiness. What good doth it do me that the world should think me successful, if I am the discontented slave of unfulfilled desires? What harm, on the other hand, can it bring, if they pity my unsuccess, while I move among them with a singing heart? Life is but a dream, a projected phantasy, vaporous, changeful, unreal. The reality lies only in the dreamer, and if he dream happily, his life—his dream—is a successful one. The onlookers can see but a fragment of it, and, curtailed thus, it is *their* picture, not *his*. They may be witnessing a

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nightmare, and gaze at it with envy ; or looking into the face of Heaven, and unwittingly pass it by. If success meant otherwise, failure would be stamped upon humanity. As it is, we live in mansions of our own designing, to which few are admitted but the architects themselves. These look through the windows upon an unseeing crowd, and so long as they can enjoy the peace of their premises, the freedom of their own creation, riches can add nothing to their kingdom, nor fame to their bliss.

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Leisure.

THE man without leisure lives on a treadmill, for he can neither stop nor step off, since others control the wheel of his days. Indeed, there is no worse slavery than continuous subjection to alien circumstance. But the freeman is he who can order a good portion of his time as the spirit moves him, unfettered by foreign wills or self-imposed exactions. One of the objects of life should therefore be, not so much work for itself, as to achieve eventual emancipation from it. That is the ultimate purpose and true reward of toil. To martyr oneself by unremitted drudgery is to be blind to the art of life. We come into the world, we know not why, and are hurried out of it, we know not whither. Is it not absurd to suppose that the highest philosophy is to grind oneself upon

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the stone of toil for its own sake? Labour is only good in so far as it brings relief in its train. The least that we can ask of mortality is that our sojourn here should be as supportable as our many ills can make it. To deliver us into the hands of Fortune for fifty, sixty, or seventy years, independently of any original volition of our own, and then to expect us to mortify the flesh and put a halter on the spirit until the time of trial is over, is contrary to reason and all human instinct.

The aim of the wise is to live with pleasure—to win the respite of a little independence, the only state in which man can be said to exist, not as a beast of burden, but as a being with divine faculties. It is leisure that makes life tolerable. Without it, all effort becomes wearisome, all ambition a wasting fever, all gain valueless, and the whole catalogue of virtues a table of disappointment. Leisure is one of the gifts of the gods, denied to those who generally are deemed fortunate—kings, princes, rulers, the

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great ones of the earth. It is vouchsafed to lesser folk—kings of their own hours, princes of their own short span, whose subjects are the flying moments and whose ministers are the fancies of their own hearts.

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Politicians.

POLITICIANS have ever been a subject for popular distrust, and the reason is evident, for their advertised stock-in-trade includes the relinquishment of every consideration of personal advantage and the absorption of their interests in the public weal alone. The merchant openly confesses to a desire to make a profit. The shopman, too, sells you his goods and admits to a percentage on the transaction, without which, he tells you, he could not live. The civil servant, with a family to keep, toils all the year round, pockets his salary, and who blames him? The soldier and the sailor receive their pay, grumble at the inadequacy of the reward, and every one agrees with them. Even the minister of religion can acknowledge without shame that he has to work for his bread in the calling best suited to his temperament and

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abilities, and takes his hard-earned stipend as a matter of course. With the politician, however, it is otherwise. The very idea of profit, of a wage, is unpopular, if not disgraceful, in his case. The cure of immortal souls can go hand in hand with emolument, and no one have a smirching word to say ; but as soon as a politician receives a farthing for his labours, behold, he is making a living out of a sacred trust, and preying upon his fellow-men !

What, then, is the reason for this distinction between those engaged in politics, and in any of the other professions ? It lies, doubtless, in this : that the activities of the politician affect every one of us in all our earthly concerns. His schemes can interfere with every instant of our lives, and may influence them profoundly. The distinction, in short, is one not of principle, but of degree. As his power ranges so much wider a field, his good faith must be all the more established before we entrust him with authority, his disinterestedness in serving us the more conspicuous and certain. It would be too grave

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a hazard to place all these threads of our fortune in the hands of those for whom private gain was a consideration. And, therefore, safeguards have to be devised, pledges extracted, precautions taken on the one side, and promises given, sacrifices endured, appearances maintained on the other. Personal profit has to be abjured, or at least concealed ; and the result is that the profession of politics is, on the face of it, the most arduous and meanly paid of any in the world.

This, however, never deters a large number of ambitious persons from aspiring to a seat in Parliament. The glamour of publicity dazzles them ; ignorance of the strain, of the long seasons of inevitable weariness and disappointment blinds them ; and once in the charmed circle, they can hardly quit it without confession of failure to friend and foe. So on they plod, slaves to their pride, and in their own interests extol the system, magnifying their zeal and influence to all whom they chance to meet. Politicians, after all, are as human as the rest of mankind—as stupid and

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as wise, as self-seeking and as public-spirited, as broad-minded and as narrow, as lustful and as pure, as upright and as criminal. The only difference is that they have happened on a profession which affords them limitless opportunities of touching the affairs of others at almost every point of life, and that their patrons consequently have to be more wary in their choice, and they themselves more cautious in soliciting confidence, than in the case of any other occupation with a less extensive scope. If you buy a bootlace in the street which proves rotten when you use it, your philosophy can more easily put up with the nuisance than with the curse of a corrupt Administration that vexes every moment of your waking hours.

There are half-a-dozen main incentives that tempt men to a political career. They may be in conjunction, or become modified, or even radically alter with the years; but, in general, the catalogue will be found to stand. The first man enters Parliament for the sake of social advancement—hoping to obtain a

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title, or access to a society whose barriers have hitherto been closed to him. The second has some business advantage in view, since a politician will have a better chance in the world of finance, with his manifold opportunities of gleaning information and gaining the ear of influential persons, than if he were merely a private individual. The third regards Parliament in the light of a club, where a member is in the thick of great things, and hears all the important gossip of the day. The fourth wants office, being in need of money. The fifth covets power, and with it fame—the opportunity to rule others and govern their destinies. Lastly, the sixth steps into the political arena for the sake of public service, inspired, maybe, by enthusiasms, and bent upon reforms which he hopes to carry. Of these, the last finds by far the fewest companions and the swiftest disillusionment. But together they form the little microcosm of the general sense and attributes of the nation. They are the engine of government, the ultimate, considered choice of their country-

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men and their age, and, like all human contrivances, a clumsy and pathetic makeshift.

To blame the politicians is, therefore, to blame the people. The latter get the politicians, as well as the governments, they deserve; and the first incorruptible legislature that any country will see, will be when its people, from whom both politicians and Government are drawn, are themselves incorrupt; when self-interest has vanished from their midst—when the golden age has dawned. Any other supposition is a vain and indolent imagining.

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Genius.

GENIUS is inspiration from without, rather than an awakening from within. It is the Universal speaking through the individual. That is why no man is master of it. He may wait for it, yearn for it, woo it, but cannot command it. There are chords within him that quiver and make answer when the spirit smites them. But it is not he who lays his hands on them, but a force beyond himself, which seizes upon him for the moment as a medium for its own revelation. It is for this reason that no one can explain his own genius or expound the secret of his work. He is but a translator, a transmitter, an instrument attuned by fortune's chance to the unplumbed, shoreless seas that swirl invisibly but everlastingly about us.

Although, therefore, such an instrument is a source of wonder, it is marvellous as a

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medium only, for it has no creative faculty, being merely an interpreter. Its utterance is sometimes involuntary, frequently misunderstood by itself, and thus it is the revelation rather than the mouthpiece that should be the object of honour. In statecraft, in stagecraft, in science, in philosophy, in every branch of artistry and human excellence, in every sphere of thought and action, this principle prevails. As we make idols of particular women, when it is the self-revelation of Beauty that we should rather worship, so too do we make heroes of leaders, of poets, of painters, of musicians, when it is the voice of incarnate loveliness or truth before which we should prostrate ourselves.

Indeed, there is naught admirable in humanity, save in so far as it is visited by the Spirit. That alone can give it splendour and life. Without some breath of it, we are little better than lay figures—inarticulate, sealed. The Universal has passed us by, having found us useless for its manifestations. Strangers to inspiration, we mumble our creeds

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at second-hand. In short, we are non-conductors, dead earths to the racing current which issues whence none can say, and bursts forth like a leaping flame, here, maybe, or there, perchance, for no apparent reason, and at intervals that no one can foretell.

Fortunate are they who are elected to be channels for the great pulse of the Universe. We all feel its mighty throbbings. They beat round every one, but only vitalise the very few. There was something lacking at the birth of most of us—an indistinguishable filament, perhaps, absent or unfinished, or ruptured at some invisible point, which prevents the spark from flashing through. We may have every other quality and all the talents, but this one faculty is withheld—the capacity of transmission, the gift of genius. Thus has it ever been; and those who are in closest harmony with the elemental energies of the unseen world recognise the most clearly that they are agents only, obeying the bidding of a power that they never understand and cannot coerce. It possesses them one day and is

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gone the next, and may forsake them without warning, never to return.

While we marvel at Nature's contrivances, we had best refrain, therefore, from idolising the messengers of the Spirit, as though they were themselves creators and originators. For they are merely outlets for the expression of the universal mind, ignorant of the laws that made them so, and impotent to control them.

The Art of Living.

REGARD your life as high comedy, rather than as tragedy. For tragedy is failure, and failure breeds contempt. To be reasonably satisfied with things as they are, Fate must be hidden in the wings. Inevitable consequences, irretrievable opportunities — these are the source of all sadness. To invite them into our midst, to obtrude them upon attention, is to make a boon-companion of Despair. To run to the other extreme and make a low farce of life is even worse. To be a clown, a world's fool, to degrade our griefs, our loves, the ills of poor mortality with base laughter, can make even the cynic weep. But the art of fine living is the art of high comedy. To act one's part elegantly, soberly, intelligently; setting the good against the evil; neither too grave nor too frivolous; treating each day partly as a duty, partly as a sport, chiefly as

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a science—this is the stage and play at its best.

For life is one of the great sciences. As in painting or in politics, in war or in letters, some are to the manner born. They have the freedom of their art by instinct. A few, again, become experts after long trial, when half their race, or more, is run. To others, to the vast majority, the science is an enigma to the very end. To them life is a tribulation rather than an art—a ceaseless struggle for the unattained, a diseased restlessness, an aimless circuit of unsatisfying occupations, a fevered groping after self-expression.

How different is it with him who is master of life's craft, the one craft that matters! You may be a magician in any other, and if you fail in this, you have failed in life. But if you are master here, no other accomplishment is necessary to make your days a triumph. It is not to be rich or a leader of fashion, to be famous or powerful, to be beloved or admired; nor even to be content—that is not the art of life. It may include some of these, or all of

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them, but not all of them together can make you a master of the art of living. That is an art by itself, as individual, as heaven-sent, as precious, as the draughtsmanship of Leonardo, or the large humanity of Cervantes.

Wherein lies its secret? It is the sense of what is best in animate and inanimate nature, coupled with the power of extracting it and enlisting it for one's own enjoyment. It is the critical, in conjunction with the social, faculty that constitutes the master of the art of life. For the first eliminates the material of ignoble affections and mean ambitions, discriminating between the genuine and the spurious, the permanent and the ephemeral, the dead and the living; whilst the social faculty ensures him a welcome to this purged world of his choice, making him a partner in its privileges, a shareholder in its glories, a contributor to the relationship which knits the little community into a reality, and gives it an actual and corporate existence. Upon these twin qualities, the art of life depends. A man may be endowed with the critical without the

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social, or with the social and be lacking in the necessary discernment, or he may be gifted in a measure with both. But the ampler his share of them, and the more perfect their equipoise, the greater master will he be of this enviable and elusive art, the finer exponent of the game of life.

This is no paltry ambition, for it demands courage as well as wisdom. It embraces nearly all the virtues, and vice is nothing but a hindrance to it. It sets an example to be followed and a prize to be won. Taking no more than it gives, it affords nothing but pleasure. While its aim is being accomplished, it is an unmixed blessing ; an honour to the man himself, and a joy to the hearts of all who behold him.

Imagination.

IMAGINATION is the power of apprehending the underlying relationship between things—of combining the shattered world once more into unity. The common run of men observe phenomena in manifold association, and are able to reproduce this association in their minds. This is the inferior kind of imagination, and is purely memorial. But others have an instinct for this affinity without the help of experience. It is not necessary for these that the parts of a picture should be actually assembled in their view in order for them to be aware of their inherent relationship, and to visualise the whole when a portion of it only happens to be present. They are aware of the synthesis, independently of any recollection of such grouping. As the first kind of mental faculty has been called me-

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morial, so may the second be termed creative. It is a consciousness of the interdependence of all Being : a dim and remote instinct which all of us possess, but which in the majority is too submerged and feeble to render much service in the productive work of the intellect. An act of imagination is the stirring of this consciousness, which, irrespective of gathered knowledge, discovers unity everywhere. The more or the less of this faculty, therefore, depends not on a knack of invention, of piecing together the particles of experience in ingenious patterns and designs, but on this intuitive apprehension of the community of things. The man with imagination beholds the Universe rather as a whole, and to that extent his contribution to the common store is the truer and more valuable ; while he who is without it sees the world in disconnected fragments, while the perfect image is reposing unsummoned and unawakened in his soul.

Pity not him, therefore, because of his circumstances who has the gift of Imagina-

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tion, for he is richer than Midas and more powerful than imperial Cæsar. With the alchemy of thought he can transmute the base metal of fact into purest gold, and his kingdom is only bounded by the roving of his own fancy. While you are trudging the highway, he is scaling heaven on wings of fire, climbing to the very tabernacle of light, and viewing the gropings of mortality beneath him. If *yours* is a world of shadows, *his* is full of substance, for creation is ever in progress there, and new forms are being added to it every day. The one is but a vault of bones, inventoried, dismembered, and falling into dust, while, in the other, energy is reproducing itself in countless shapes and limitless combinations. You and I, the generality of mankind, sight-seers and lookers-on, are merely conservators of the crumbling past, whilst he is a master-spinner, weaving new fabrics in the loom of life. No hurt that you may do him can blind this sixth sense; no discouragement can atrophy it. Thrust him into a dungeon, and out of his hardships he will spin a romance

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to make the world laugh—aye, and weep—for a thousand years. Withhold learning from him, give him ploughmen for his companions and peasants' daughters for his loves, yet he will move the hearts of all the schools. Drive him into a profession that is held in public disesteem, with coxcombs for his patrons and mountebanks for his intimates, and all the nations shall sit at his feet. Brand him as a felon, let him die like a dog in a ditch, his whole life's work a seeming failure, and his name shall be worshipped in every clime. For imagination is a talisman against corruption, a philtre for ill-usage and neglect, and a spell that prevails amid all the vicissitudes of youth and age.

You who possess this vision—great architects and explorers, revealers of the mysteries of truth and beauty!—how sparingly you are sometimes paid; with what scanty honour are you treated, when a trifling recompense and a small share of recognition would make all the difference between indigence and sufficiency, disappointment and success! You toil for

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Posterity, and are paid by posthumous fame, but your days are often passed in want and obscurity, while dullards wear the laurels that are rightly yours. What then is your reward? Is it in to-morrow's anniversary, or a public monument, when your mortal shell is a ruin, and your spirit has been liberated from its prison walls? Is this the glittering prize, when naught material or human matters; when to be on a million lips signifies nothing? If it were so, despair would overwhelm your effort, and irredeemable sadness be the lot of man. But your reward is here, in the realm of your own mind. Here you are lord indeed. Your thoughts are like alms that you give to beggary, for your treasury is within you—inexhaustible, priceless—and you distribute its contents to the needy and the barren. Recognition of your merit is within your empire too, for is it not the commendation of your own soul, the deep, unchangeable consciousness of royalty? Your subjects may be wayward, ungrateful, disloyal, but you are their King, and tolerant of their blindness.

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This is your reward—not a *post-mortem* discovery of worth, nor a name in history, nor the flattery of the future, but the exercise of your splendid faculty, whether crowned with fame or unbeknown.

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The Family Clock.

IF you listen too much to the clock, madness will overtake you, for it has no heart. It has spoken thus, mechanically, unvaryingly, for nigh three centuries—three hundred years of packed and fateful history, of battles, weddings, coronations, funerals, of childhood and old age, manhood and women's beauty. In the midst of human anguish it has never faltered, nor quickened to a different key when mirth and laughter have echoed round it. The cries of birth, the heart-aches of youth, the gasping breath of dying agony, have left it unpitying and unmoved. It measures Time—its only interest and only task—tonelessly, relentlessly, uninterruptedly. As it has ticked out the seconds through all the changing fortune of your own life, recording the minutes and fading hours of your follies and repentances, your good and evil actions, your failures and successes, so will it

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tick them off for those who follow after you, when you are in the grave.

It not only marks the moments of this small household, but of all the households of the world—in the heart of London, on the banks of the Ganges, under the wall of China, in the sands of Egypt. Nothing has escaped its reckoning—this ceaseless march of the minutes—and nothing can escape it. The gloomy and the gay, the trivial and important, the ugly and the beautiful, the wise and the foolish, all have the same transient destiny, and it spells out their little span, indifferent to their worth and pretensions, without emotion and without remission. It is Time herself—the Inexorable—that you are listening to. She is giving you audience in the Hall of Fate. You are standing alone in the presence of the Eternal, hearing the answer to your impracticable suit. If only she would grant you a little respite, a brief halt by the way, an interlude of blessed, unageing rest; if only she would humour you as a parent humours his children

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—for are we not the offspring, the children of our time? There is something derisive and deadly in this callous disregard of the fate and feelings of those who are caught unawares in the net of life.

He only can listen to this endless beat without despair who has no hope, no ambition, no illusions, no regret. In it he hears the vanity of the world passing away, the sound of all things crumbling into ruin, the eternity of disillusionment, the remorseless reminder that nothing matters. For him nothing does matter. He is in tune with the old clock, and can strike a kind of ironic fellowship with its ticking doom. But you who have hope and ambition, who have illusions not yet dead; you, who feel the pangs of regret and memories of the past plucking at your heart, beware of listening too closely to it. For you are hearkening to the very voice of the Sphinx, to the utterance of an inscrutable mystery, that will have no pity for your weakness and will craze your senses if you are attentive overmuch.

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Celestial Bodies.

IF you stroll through the streets of any of our large towns, what mysteries will gaze out upon you, what chronicles you will see engraved in the features of the passers-by !

Here are two Sisters of Mercy, hooded and footsore, turning from a doorway. What does it matter to them who the Prime Minister is, or whether they are living under a monarchy or republic ? With downcast eyes, meekly, but with unconquerable resolution, they move to and fro, the self-constituted intermediaries between all that is brilliant and prosperous on the one hand, and all that is sordid and wretched on the other. Out of the dens of misery they come to knock at the doors of wealth and success, and then back again they turn to minister to the degraded, the dying, and the destitute. Where they themselves

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find shelter, who knows? Have *they* any Samaritan who cares? What is the history, the personal record, of these intrepid women? Did youth ever claim them in the irresponsible, far-off days?—and will some memorial, set with reverent care, mark some day the place of their long sleep? Mutely, with grave, pale faces, they pass us in the street, mystical and shrouded, unconcerned with and uncoloured by the busy life about them. Peace be to your souls, courageous comforters! Unattractive to the outward eye though you may be, bringing with you, too, the odours of foetid cabins, yet to me you are sweet and lovely. I see you transfigured—stripped of that uncomely garb and girt in the drapery of the Celestial, with stars in your hair and your feet in the blue of Heaven, extinguishable happiness shining in your eyes.

Another woman passes, a smile as of death upon her face. For very weariness she can scarce trail one step after another. Through the rouge can be seen the suffering of years—starvation, squalor, despair, entreaty. Who,

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ignorant of her history, shall judge her—the cruelties she has endured, the shifts she has been put to, the blackguard fortune that has dogged her ever since she was a girl? She is as human as your own sister, perhaps as generous and as kind, as honourable and as tender. Her child, maybe, is dependent on her earnings. Never a word but of motherly purity has he heard from those painted lips, but while he sleeps in his narrow cot, she tramps the streets to win his bread. Poor social cast-away! You, too, I see differently—metamorphosed. Neither bedizened, nor haggard, nor outcast, but clad in vestal white, blameless and at peace, beholding your little one with proud and radiant eyes.

And now an incurable cripple hobbles by—a mere fragment of twisted humanity, a hunchback on crutches. Every movement drives a spasm across his wasted features, yet he is gallantly whistling to keep up appearances. What has life vouchsafed to him? Every look that has rested on him since birth has been one of pity, derision, or disgust; every avenue of advancement has been closed.

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There is hardly a man or woman who could view him and deny that it would have been better by far had he never been born. But he is whistling a merry tune to keep up appearances, this pathetic bagful of crooked bones. Here is a brave man, unsoured, un-resentful, charitable. Look at him well. He, too, is waiting for his apotheosis, and I see him transformed, erect like Apollo, bearing in his countenance the light of victory, with the burden of his mortal days lying at his feet.

We may pause beneath the moon on a still and cloudless night, gazing in wonder at the heavenly constellations, that majestic multitude of worlds, so countless and unapproachable — an immutable, unfathomable host. But with what worlds we are surrounded in the daily walks of life, in variety without number, but fixed, each one of them, in its own changeless orbit by the same overshadowing power! Vast worlds are these, as boundless as imagination, as deep as love, peopled with all the passions and the fancies of which men are the inheritors—a few feet,

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each of them, of flesh and blood, seen across the mighty distances that separate the depths of common ignorance, but, in truth, measureless and mysterious, as they cross our vision on their unknown journeyings through light into darkness, and from darkness into light.

